

Plague

Agent: *Yersinia pestis* (bacteria)

Mode of Transmission: Transmitted to humans through the bite of infected fleas or through handling tissue or body fluids of a plague-infected animal. If the disease attacks the lungs, it may be spread from person to person by respiratory droplets released when coughing.

Signs/Symptoms: Fever, chills, nausea, headache and body aches. Specific types of plague also lead to other symptoms, such as swollen lymph nodes (“buboes”), bloodstream infections, and pneumonia.

Prevention: In areas where plague occurs, travelers should avoid contact with rodents and fleas and avoid handling stray animals. Persons with plague that results in pneumonia should be isolated until 48 hours after antibiotics have been started.

Other Important Information: Modern antibiotics are effective in treating plague; however, without prompt treatment, the disease can result in serious illness or death. Fewer than 20 people in the United States are diagnosed with plague every year. The last urban plague epidemic in the U.S. occurred in Los Angeles from 1924 through 1925. Human plague infections continue to occur in the western United States in two particular regions, one being northern New Mexico, northern Arizona, and southern Colorado and the other being California, southern Oregon, and far western Nevada. In the past few decades, an average of seven cases of human plague have been reported each year. In 2015, a total of 16 confirmed cases of plague were reported to CDC. These are the most reported cases since 2006. Four cases in 2015 were fatal. Many more cases occur internationally, mostly in Africa and Asia. *Y. pestis* is considered to be one of the agents that could be used for bioterrorism because the bacteria can be spread from person to person and would cause increased illness and death in the population if it were used as a weapon.

No cases of plague have been reported in Virginia since the nineteenth century.